

FOREWORD

by

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell

Over the past two decades, the Western Hemisphere has seen dramatic advances in the institutionalization of democracy and the spread of free market economies. Today, the nations of the Americas are working in close partnership to build a hemisphere based on political and economic freedom where dictators, traffickers and terrorists cannot thrive.

As fate would have it, I was in Lima, Peru joining our hemispheric neighbors in the adoption of the Inter-American Democratic Charter when the terrorists struck the United States on September 11, 2001. By adopting the Democratic Charter, the countries of our hemisphere made a powerful statement in support of freedom, humanity and peace.

Conspicuous for its absence on that historic occasion was Cuba. Cuba alone among the hemispheric nations did not adopt the Democratic Charter. That is not surprising, for Cuba alone among the nations of Americas is a dictatorship. For over four decades, the regime of Fidel Castro has imposed upon the Cuban people a communist system of government that systematically violates their most fundamental human rights. Just last year, the Castro regime consigned 75 human rights activists, independent librarians and journalists and democracy advocates to an average of nearly 20 years of imprisonment. These prisoners of conscience are serving out their harsh sentences under inhumane and highly unsanitary conditions, where medical services are wholly inadequate.

The Democratic Charter clearly states: "The peoples of the Americas have a right to democracy and their governments have an obligation to promote and defend it." In fulfillment of that solemn obligation, the United States remains strongly committed to supporting the efforts of the Cuban people to secure the blessings of democracy for themselves and their children.

President Bush formed the U.S. Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba to explore ways we can help hasten and ease Cuba's democratic transition. As this report shows, the United States seeks to cooperate with neighbors in the hemisphere and nations across the globe to help Cubans prepare for democratic change. We want to help Cubans build an independent civil society. We want to do all we possibly can to free the flow of ideas and information to, from and across the island. We are adjusting U.S. economic pressure to counter the ever evolving ways the Castro regime attempts to replenish the coffers that fund the subjugation of the Cuban people. And the United States will stand with those in Cuba who courageously speak in defense of human rights and work for political and economic reform.

Our goal is a true democratic transition. We want to help the Cuban people put Castro and Castroism behind them forever. Any post-Castro succession that perpetuates the regime's hold on power would be completely contrary to the hemisphere's commitment to freedom. There can be no reconciliation between the United States and Cuba until far-reaching steps are taken to ensure political and economic liberty on the island. Indeed, under the Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act of 1996, the United States is prohibited by law from providing assistance to a post-Castro transition government unless that government legalizes all political activity, releases all political prisoners, publicly commits to organizing free and fair elections within 18 months, and bars Fidel and Raul Castro from any role in a future government.

In Cuba's transition to democracy, we envision and welcome an active role for the Cuban American community. The United States has been enriched by the Cuban American community's culture, entrepreneurial spirit and patriotism. The success of Cuban Americans demonstrates the great capacity of the Cuban people to prosper in freedom and serves as a source of hope and inspiration to their brothers and sisters on the island. Cuban Americans will be able to provide valuable insights, as well as business acumen and capital, as the citizens of

Cuba work to repair the devastation done to the Cuban society and economy by more than forty years of communism.

We also can draw on the lessons we have learned from our experiences assisting the peoples of East and Central Europe and the former Soviet Union with their transitions from communism to democracy and free markets. And, as was the case with the East Bloc nations, we see an important part for the multilateral financial institutions to play in Cuba's transition.

We hope that this Report will help the United States, our neighbors in the Americas and free nations across the globe better support the efforts of the Cuban people to secure their right to democracy and realize their dreams for a better future.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'C.L. Powell', with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Colin L. Powell